

State Representative  
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## 2007 Mid-Session Report

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## State Representative **Mary Lou Dickerson**

36th Legislative District

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### Committees

Human Services - Chair  
Transportation  
Agriculture and Natural Resources

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Dear Friends,

I'm excited by how well the 2007 legislative session is progressing. Our state budget is in good shape and there is a healthy spirit of bipartisan cooperation on key 36th District priorities such as education, health care, environmental protection and social justice.

There's one major change this year in my role as your representative: I've been selected to chair the House Human Services Committee! This new role will help me represent our district's values and our commitment to children and families.

As you'll see, this report focuses on four priority issues. I'll cover other vital 36th district issues—including education, health care and transportation—in future newsletters. But there's an easy way to learn the latest news on my legislative work for our district. Just visit my web site and sign up for the Legislative E-memo. It highlights breaking legislative news with a local focus. You can unsubscribe at any time, and your e-mail address won't be shared or used for any political campaign. I respect your privacy!

Although I'm quite busy during legislative sessions, please remember I'm never too busy to hear or address the needs of 36th District individuals, families or businesses. So please never hesitate to share your thoughts, questions or concerns with me. You're the reason I'm here, and I'm proud to serve the best legislative district in the state!

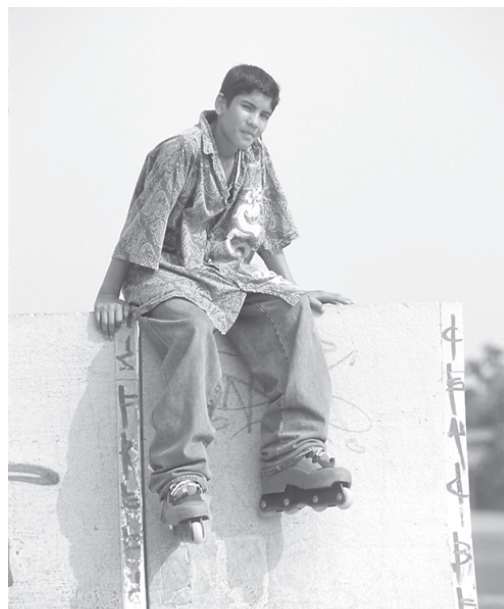
Sincerely,

Mary Lou

## Helping foster youth thrive

The successful Foster Youth Achievement Act I sponsored last year spotlighted the tragic results of abandoning foster youth when they "age out" of the system: More than half experience long periods of unemployment. 13% become homeless. 22% are jailed. This is shocking when you remember that the state is the parent of foster children. No decent parents would abandon their children on their 18th birthday or on graduation day.

Last year's Foster Youth Achievement Act helped by continuing support to foster kids who pursue college degrees. This year we can make even more progress. I'm supporting measures to improve mental health services for children in foster care, offer college scholarships to talented foster youth, and allow health coverage for foster youth to continue until age 21. The House has already passed these proposals, and I believe they'll become law this year. These kids richly deserve our compassion and support.





**Making children’s mental health a priority**

The children’s mental health system is broken. It is not really a system at all, but a patchwork of sporadic care that is usually too little and too late. Instead of providing early treatment based on the best scientific practices, we deny care until the mental illness is truly acute or has resulted in serious crimes. The results are tragic and expensive.

Our juvenile justice system has become a dumping ground for mentally-ill children. Nearly two-thirds of youth in our juvenile-justice institutions have serious mental illnesses. The average cost of one bed in these institutions is \$50,000 to \$60,000 a year.



More than two-thirds of foster children suffer serious emotional disturbances, usually due to trauma. Yet foster kids who need help are typically left untreated until after they are permanently scarred or stigmatized by behaviors tied to their illness. Many who are denied timely treatment will remain wards of the state at a cost of up to \$16,000 a year.

In the general population, children with untreated mental illness often end up in hospital emergency rooms. The cost of one in-patient psych hospitalization is about \$1,000 a day!

Of course, the financial costs of untreated mental illness are small when compared to the often permanent psychological damage done to children. But these dollar amounts show we all have a stake in reforming children’s mental health care.

**The answer**

More than 60 leading organizations – including the American Academy of Pediatrics, Children’s Alliance and Washington State Psychological Association—worked with me to design the foundations of a real children’s mental health system that is based on the best scientific evidence. Our reforms will:

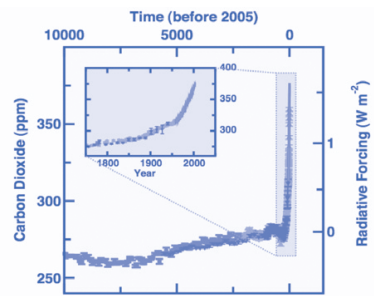
- Ensure children can get needed treatment at earlier stages of their illness;
- Increase the comprehensiveness of treatment available to children;
- Create an institute to assemble and share scientific research on the most effective practices in treating pediatric mental illnesses;
- Provide “wraparound” services for children and families in very acute cases; and
- Train more primary care providers in the diagnosis and appropriate treatment of children with mental illness.

These reforms will not be cheap, but they will be far less expensive than the costs we all pay for untreated mental illness. By focusing on best practices, we will also reduce the serious problem of over-medicating children.

When Supreme Court Justice Bobbe J. Bridge testified for my bill (HB 1088), she described how parents came to her almost daily “literally crying for help for young people—help that they could not get until they committed a serious felony.” The children’s mental health reforms I’ve proposed will answer the calls for help from children and their parents.

The House of Representatives recently voted 92-4 to enact these needed reforms. I believe the Senate and Governor will soon join us in calling for a new and better approach to children’s mental health.

**Clean Air—Clean Fuels: the future of energy**

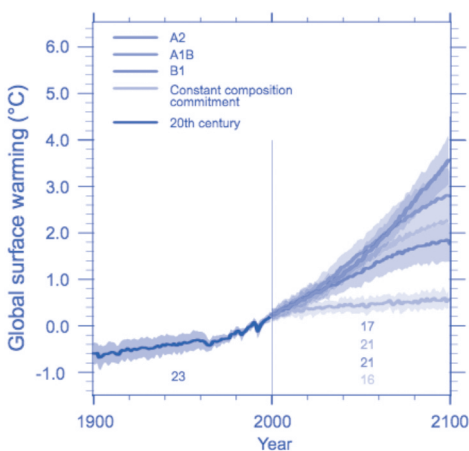
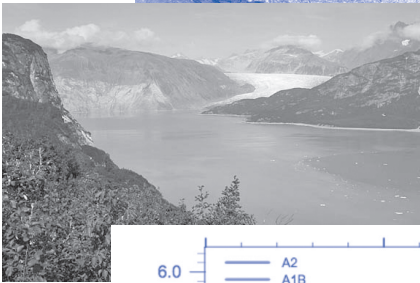


What do the Association of Washington Business, Greater Seattle Business Association, Superintendent of Public Instruction, American Lung Association and 21 leading state environmental organizations have in common? Answer: They all support my Clean Air—Clean Fuels strategy for promoting locally-produced clean energy that reduces air pollution and our dependence on imported petroleum.

We clearly need a new strategy. Our economy loses \$30 million each day to import dirty fossil fuels that pollute our air, inflame respiratory diseases, increase cancer rates and cause global warming.

The good news is that Washington has the technological and agricultural resources to be a world leader in clean energy production and use. But we need state leadership to serve as the catalyst. That’s where the Clean Air—Clean Fuels Bill comes in—it directs our state government to lead by example and create incentives for converting from imported fossil fuels to clean and renewable biofuels produced locally. These reforms would:

- ✓ Protect children’s health by giving schools financial incentives to replace about 700 old high-pollution diesel buses with new ultra-low sulfur buses. Diesel pollution is a leading precursor to cancer in children. New buses are also cheaper to maintain.
- ✓ Require all state agencies to reduce fossil fuel consumption by at least 25% by 2020, and require government vehicle fleets to satisfy their fuel needs with biofuels or electricity by 2015, unless exceptions are specifically authorized.
- ✓ Authorize market incentives to help Washington’s farmers produce crops or convert plant wastes into clean biofuels. A new Energy Freedom office would coordinate state efforts and encourage wider use of biofuels and clean energy alternatives.
- ✓ Help Washington ports slash air pollution from port operations. This is quickly becoming a major Seattle issue due to the soaring number of visiting cruise ships.
- ✓ Involve the University of Washington and Washington State in long-term analysis and planning to mitigate impacts of global warming.



The Washington Environmental Council and other leading environmental organizations have made the Clean Air—Clean Fuels strategy one of their top four priorities for 2007. I’m working hard to pass it into law before the end of April.

**Family and Medical Leave Insurance**

What happens to employees when a baby is born, or when Mom or Dad or a spouse or a child suddenly becomes seriously ill? Most employers have the heart to provide time off. But too many workers simply cannot afford to take unpaid time off and so are forced to choose between the wages they need and the family they love.



Washington’s employers and employees need a way out of these crushing dilemmas. They need the Family and Medical Leave Insurance (FMLI) I’ve sponsored in HB 1658!

FMLI offers wage-replacement benefits of \$250 per week for up to five weeks of leave for the arrival of a new child, care of a seriously ill family member, or for the worker’s own serious illness. It’s all financed by a modest premium of 2 cents per hour worked, paid by employees.



I’m thrilled by the statewide support for our proposal. A new poll found 73% of Washington voters support our plan, with super-majority support from every group, including women (79%), men (65%), Democrats (86%), Republicans (60%), Independents (67%), senior citizens (76%) and persons under age 40 (73%).

We’ve worked hard to tailor the insurance program to address the special needs of small businesses. In fact, 87% of small businesses interviewed say they support Family and Medical Leave Insurance after hearing its details.

There has been a lot of talk in recent years about “family values.” This is a reform that truly values families by helping workers to be there for their loved ones in times of crisis. It’s time for Washington families to have Family and Medical Leave Insurance!